

Between Legitimacy and Efficiency: The Development of Forestry Associations in Germany

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In many countries, forestry associations represent an important forest policy tool for overcoming the problems that often arise with small forest ownership. In Germany associations are established for economic reasons as well as for reasons pertaining to governance. For over 100 years there has been discussion concerning the suitability of various organisational models. Of the wide spectrum of possible organisational forms, only a few variants have been used as of late. These are often accredited as being inefficient with regard to the extent to which they fulfil their intended functions. This paper researches the reasons for various assumptions made of neo-institutionalism with regard to the establishment and survival of forestry associations. The analysis is based on public and scientific debate of this topic. It gives an overview of the political discussion that has taken place over the last few decades as well as the current state of related scientific literature. It can be shown that, aside from issues related to the efficiency of associations in the fulfilment of duties, the impact that associations have with regard to legitimising the engagement of other actors and their supply of resources is also relevant.

Keywords: Small-scale private forestry, cooperation, forestry associations, neo-institutionalism

INTRODUCTION

In many societies, consent exists not only that ownership should be institutionally secured, but that the benefit of its widespread dispersal among numerous people is also recognised. In the case of forest ownership, widespread dispersal of ownership also means that a large number of owners possess many small parcels which are difficult to manage efficiently (Streyffert 1957). In Germany about 12% of the forest area belongs to people who own less than 1 ha, and a further 20% belongs to those owning between one and 200 ha. In total, about 1.5 M people own forests. Through many surveys it has become clear that most forest owners today are no longer farmers. The proportion of forest owners that have their main occupation in agriculture varies according to region. Recent studies in western Germany show that between 14% and 48% belong to this group (Bollin and Eklkofer 2000, Hårdter

2003); in post-socialist eastern Germany, forest owners are active in agriculture to a lesser extent (12%, Köpf 1997).

The formation of forestry associations as a tool to foster the cooperation of small-scale private forest owners raises hope in many regions of the world. In this regard countries with a long tradition of associations, such as Sweden and Norway, stand in contrast to countries with relatively new associations, including the USA. Germany falls somewhere in the middle of this range (Mantau 1981, Ottitsch 2001, Kittredge 2003, 2005). Although it has a long tradition of cooperation amongst private forest owners, it still has major problems forming efficient associations. Today the organisational forms of the forestry associations in Germany as well as the degree to which the owners themselves are organised vary greatly from region to region. Currently 5,403 such associations with 449,000 members and 3.3 M ha of forest exist, with large differences in size and professionalism of management from a business perspective (Leinert 1996, Rapp 1998, Bundesregierung 2004).

Although forestry associations today are taking over economic functions in the interests of their voluntarily organised members, they are also conceived as an instrument for (1) influencing management standards of small forests and (2) assembling larger, more marketable volumes of timber. State forest policy as well as the model of forest certification that is currently dominating in Germany (i.e. the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes), both rely on the connections of forestry associations to small private forests. The concept of supporting the formation and maintenance of forestry associations as a policy tool to reach public objectives faces a continuous dilemma. Forestry associations not only try to engage people with a commonly shared belief in the need for timber production, but also try to engage forest owners who manage their forests in unconventional ways. For this reason both the principle of volunteer membership and the idea of transferring property rights from at least some forest owners to an organisation are important components of forestry associations.

Small private forests in Germany largely came into being through the ceding of usage rights, the separation and distribution of community forests, as well as the dispossession and division of large private forestry businesses. Collective or state management of the associations' forest area actually means the reversal of these processes, away from those which had previously provided forest owners with property rights. Independent of the political systems, the property rights of small forest owners as a means to promote efficient wood production were repeatedly questioned. As a result, demands for the creation of forestry cooperatives ensued following the First World War, as was also the case during the Second World War, when the National Socialist regime attempted to hasten the formation of forestry cooperatives under public law. Today, stakeholders agree that association membership should be on a voluntary basis. Nonetheless, they do expect the associations to assume the responsibility of forest management, especially for those non-farming forest owners who are not able or not willing to harvest and sell timber.

Although in the past there has been constant doubt as to the degree to which forestry associations fulfil their duties, nothing has changed over the last few decades with regard to two aspects: (1) forestry associations are constantly criticised for their inefficiency, and (2) their central role remains in the implementation of forest political concepts. It has been asserted that, in the forestry sector, other reasons beyond the economic rationale exist for the use of associations. This paper

therefore researches the reasoning behind various assumptions of neo-institutionalism regarding the establishment and survival of forestry associations. To explore these reasons the author evaluates literature that originated in Germany. This includes the comments of actors with vested interests as well as scientific literature. Under the assumption that public expectations are especially important for understanding associations, the public debate surrounding this topic is followed over many decades (section 3) and confronted with contemporary empirical findings of the associational research (section 4). At least one model, formed using assumptions from sociological institutional theory, helps to explain the development of forestry associations in Germany (section 5).

ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

Forestry associations represent an organisational connection between business, i.e. between professional forestry operations and small private forest owners. They promote the institutionalisation of particular forest management methods. In several countries the state supports these attempts and must repeatedly justify this commitment. Several theories address related issues, such as the societal embedment of an organisation, its legitimisation, and the establishment of rules of conduct. In recent years economists, sociologists, and political scientists have all rediscovered the concept of the institution in this context (Schmid and Maurer 2003). For the following analysis of the nature of forestry associations, this term 'institution' will not be constricted nor refined; rather, the whole extent of the explanatory assessments that it offers will be used. Aside from the institution, organisation and guiding principle both present key concepts of the analysis (Table 1).

With regard to an institution this deals at its core with a 'recognised norm' (Esser 2003, p. 48), i.e. with the provision of its enforcement. Organisations are 'institutions including the people partaking therein' (Richter and Furubotn 1996, p. 7f). Actors who are equipped with resources and are legally entitled to engage in business bring their resources into the organisation for rational reasons and transfer individual rights to the organisation. These 'corporate actors' (Esser 2000) then benefit from this action in that the organisation in turn transfers the legal entitlement to engage in business onto third parties, such as timber industries. The separation of property and the property rights, as is commonly described, arises in this way (Bromley 1991, Libecap 1993). The most important expectation directed at the organisation is that it provides a means for regulating work. Property rights should be efficiently distributed, cooperation over suitable measures should be secured, and unfavourable conduct should be prevented (Edeling 2002). With regard to its structure, the organisation follows rational lines of reasoning that are in line with the objective of its members. Consequently its efficiency can be criticised using relevant criteria, and it can undergo a reform that increases or detracts from its efficiency (Stölting 1999). In this regard particularly the theory of property rights and the assessment of transaction costs enable the analysis of various organisational forms (Ostrom and Schlager 1992).

Table 1: Keywords of institutional analysis

Concept	Comprehension of concept	Social impact	Dynamics
Guiding principles	Normative demand of the institution	Legitimacy	Non-negotiable
Institution	Accepted pattern of conduct and orientation model	Governance	
Organisation	Objective-oriented, rationally formed structure	Coordination	Negotiable, subject of reforms

Source: Adapted from Stölting 1999.

Principal advocates of neo-institutionalism, which is concerned with the sociology of organisations, question the claimed significance of efficiency in the fulfilment of societal objectives for the survival of the organisation and instead highlight the importance of organisational efforts to win legitimacy (Meyer and Scott 1983, Powell and DiMaggio 1991, Scott 2001). This view only surfaces because the supposed rational assessment of the situation in which the organisation finds itself can be judged differently by different actors, throwing open the question of which viewpoint and rationale is actually being supported in the organisation. Wherever possible, conflicting interests and the power struggles of the participating actors stand in the way of the most efficient solution. The profit-seeking activities of the participants can be especially disruptive.

The recognition that the requirements for legitimacy of an organisation must not agree with those for efficiency leads to the following assumption: formal organisational structures reveal 'myths' that are institutionalised in their societal environment. It is advantageous for the organisation to take up these myths and bring them demonstratively into effect, thereby working towards a similarity in structure of organisation and society (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Thus the organisation is tied to institutionalised notions of how particular products or services are to be rationally produced. When organisations produce no clearly defined product that would allow the efficiency of the organisation's activities to be determined, the institutional legitimacy becomes crucial. For that reason they adopt preferred modes of production that are already recognised, or at least they give this impression. Organisations therefore commonly react to the abundance of societal expectations through a change to their perceivable formal structure but maintain their activities in their inner structure (Hasse and Krücken 1999).

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) have outlined more thoroughly the processes that lead to the adjustment of the organisations to environmental expectations and have found an explanation for the structural homogeneity of formal organisations that is commonly identified. According to them the societal environment is made up of an 'organisational field', in which competitors, business partners and influential agencies are active. Processes can be observed within this field that lead to an adjustment between organisations and their environment. Three forms of isomorphism are distinguished, which are only separated here for analytical purposes but are to be seen in close interaction. Adjustment is brought about through compulsion, imitation, or normative pressure. In the first case conformity is brought about through state assertiveness, in the second case through the copying of

especially successful organisations that thereby becomes a model character, and in the case of normative isomorphism, value-laden models are the result. Above all, these adjustments are based on personal decisions or those of common occupational groups, leading beyond organisational limits to an agreement in professional orientation (Göhler and Kühn 1999, Hasse and Krücken 1999).

In addition to the question of their efficient structure, the extent to which normative demands that are tied to the respective institution are being realised is at least relevant when the organisations are being reformed. Gehlen (1986) has used the term 'guiding principle' (*Leitidee*) to describe these demands. In contemporary literature the term is associated with the notion of 'the legitimising idealisation of the institution' (Stölting 1999: p. 113). Guiding principles are extracted from public discourse and are intended to be objective. They legitimise the institution in public and justify their existence. Consequently all political debates do not pertain to the guiding principle itself but rather to its organisational application. Institutions and organisations are repeatedly measured by how well they represent the guiding principle. By these means, guiding principles are significant sources of societal change. Reforms should therefore not destroy the guiding principle but rather contribute to its improved realisation.

THE PUBLIC DEBATE ABOUT FORESTRY ASSOCIATIONS

The societal environment of forestry associations in Germany is traditionally dominated by state forestry agencies, private forestry business interest groups and the timber industry. These formulate the fundamental environmental expectations. As for the guiding principle of the associations in this environment, the concept that wood from small private forests can also be professionally and sustainably produced and marketed has been advancing. The main problems with this are the high transaction costs of the management of small parcels of land and also the lack of institutionalised management rules. The organisational solutions for the anticipated forest maintenance and market orientation vary over time and space. In order to explain the existing diversity alone, the historical development of the associations is only of partial help (compare Hodapp 1971, Mantau 1981). The reactions of the associations to environmental expectations can be illustrated through the example of public debates. This section discusses the subject in four phases, in which a realignment of the associations was carried out.

Associations as Liberal Alternatives to Public Forest Policy

The agricultural crisis of the 19th century led to the heightened exploitation of many small private forests because the owners of these lands, who by nature of their profession were mostly agriculturalists, hoped to secure their income from the forest. This conflicted, of course, with the will of large forest businesses, which had become highly specialised in forestry. The latter set in motion various political initiatives in order to implement sustainable forest management in the small private forest as well.

Small forest ownership organisations developed as alternatives to the repressive state instruments that had been established. The state purchase of private forestland as well as higher management standards proved themselves to be expensive and

control-intensive; furthermore, they contradicted the increasingly liberal interpretation of the state and the economy (Möller 1902, Hasel 1953, Schmidt 1994). Therefore some of the forest laws that were decided on around 1900 explicitly presented the forest owners with the alternative of either being state controlled or becoming a member of a private association (Dannecker 1924, Mascher 1954). In this way, the forestry association established itself at first as a liberal counter-movement to state regulation. Membership of the associations was voluntary and the limitation of the member's property rights was minor. Agricultural organisations often took it upon themselves to also educate forest owners in forestry matters or to encourage reforestation. This approach has proven effective above all in regions with a more favourable ownership structure, such as those with large agricultural businesses and large forest areas. In the actual problem areas where forest lots are small and widely scattered, the membership number of organisations and their influence remained small (Mascher 1954).

Estrangement and Transference of Property Rights

Even after the Second World War, nothing had changed to the phenomenon in which associations were developing above all in areas favourable to forestry. As a result, the relevant actors still often intensively discuss the operational disadvantages of the management of small areas and the 'estrangement' of many forest owners from their property. As early as in the 1950s the German Forestry Umbrella Organisation (DFWR) summed up the common opinion of all relevant stakeholders:

Should the connection of the forest owner to his forest area be fully lost through its extensive fragmentation and estrangement, so can the necessity arise to transform such parcels into co-operatives with stronger legal obligations (DFWR 1956, p. 93).

In this context, 'estrangement' means the abandonment of forest maintenance and on occasion also the renunciation of other property rights. Organisations should counteract this deinstitutionalisation and promote the guiding principle of sustainable wood production. For decades, this has led the discussion to the same dilemma: does estrangement legitimise the systematic transfer of ownership rights to an organisation because they are not being used by the owners anyway? Or, to the contrary, does not the systematic transfer of the property rights onto a third party strengthen the estrangement because the owners are dismissed from any responsibility? Formulated differently, the transfer of individual property rights to the association is considered efficient, because it means large-scale forest management for the association and the seizure of large quantities of wood. On the other hand, it probably allows the motivation of the forest owner for forest management to fade, because he or she loses his or her management routine. This argument is mainly used by the forest owners' organisations:

Associations that are affected through legal means or forest supervision measures ... conceal the danger that the forest owner will gradually degrade to someone who is not independent, not free, and devoid of each ownership responsibility, a mere receiver of annuity (Rauchenberger 1956, p. 84).

The regularly reached compromise to only slightly curtail ownership rights in the association, if at all, results from the universal expectation that the owners will not freely give up these rights to the association, certainly not for a long period of time. Usually the associations will only become active on behalf of their members in specific cases, often restricting themselves to fields of activity outside of actual forest management, mainly the sale of timber. The state forestry agencies that profit from this situation are those that, on the one hand, support the associations and ask that the private organisations align themselves closely to the state structures, and on the other hand, also offer individual services to forest owners outside of the associations. Representatives of state forest services in particular argue in this way:

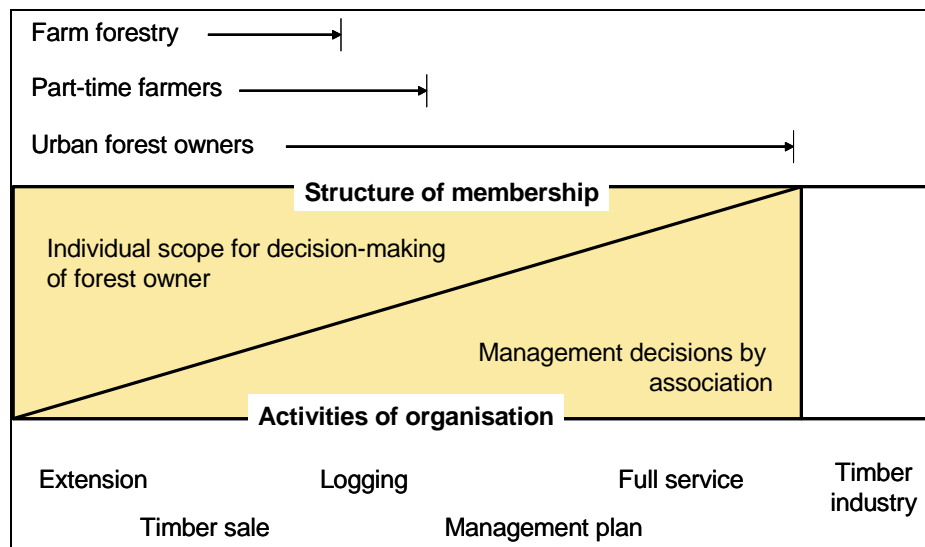
The type and manner of such associations and their inner structure should be organised along the authoritative substructure of the public extension service (Rupf 1956, p. 76).

Therefore political debate regularly leads to the recommendation to coordinate the arrangement of state and private organisations that simultaneously offer their services. The decision over how close their meshing should be – i.e. how large the state's influence on the associations should be – differs according to region. Much isomorphism is, however, evident. Associations predominantly arise that orient themselves in their organisational structure to the provision of state services and financing and are also not able to survive without this support.

Increasing the Efficiency of Associations

The organisational models for associations developed in the 1970s also orient themselves closely to the political discussion of the subject, and in the end they come to similar findings (Hodapp 1972, Brandl 1975). Brandl (1977) associated the concepts 'participation' and 'leadership style' with principles of organisation. He came to the conclusion that particular forest ownership groups are more likely to show little identification with the organisational goals of the association and consequently will not be interested in playing a participatory role in their work. He saw these conditions realised above all in the smallest private forest category. As a consequence, it seems that people who receive little income from the forest, show no professionalism and regularly demand services, have only little influence in determining the association's agenda. While the leadership style with regard to farm forest owners should be shaped 'as cooperatively as possible', a more 'authoritarian leadership style' appears suited in the urbanised small-scale private forest category (Brandl 1977).

Figure 1 clarifies this repeatedly suggested differentiation of the relationships of organisation and member through a further example of a model from the 1970s. According to this model, the degree to which management competence (i.e. property rights) are surrendered to the associations differs with regard to the heterogeneous demands of various types of forest owners.



Source: Adapted from Nießlein (1976).

Figure 1. Intensity diagram for forestry associations

The Extension of Service Centres

Since the reunification of Germany, the essential organisational principles of associations in the former West Germany have become relevant in the eastern parts of the country, where a large number of forests have been restored to small private forest owners following the restitution and privatisation of formerly state-managed lands. This situation is accompanied by the revival of sentiments surrounding the degree to which ownership rights should be transferred. Even scientists campaigned for a renewed ordering of property rights:

The predominance of forest ownership by non-farmers makes the conception of associational forms that extensively carry out services, including comprehensive management duties on behalf of members, as is the case in the west, necessary. In certain cases, the presence of numerous private forest complexes with individual ownership divided in a stripe-like fashion makes it necessary to consider the possibility of coordinating management across borders according to a uniform plan (Nießlein 1992, p. 31).

It is not expected that private initiative will lead to formation of associations. As in the west, it is hoped that employees of state agencies will supply the 'personal points of crystallisation' (Nießlein 1992, p. 49) around which private organisations are established and also take the thought into consideration that the associations are suspected to be a 'private club that assists the professional activities of the forestry authorities' (Nießlein 1992, p. 46). Suggestions of state-ruled associations regularly provoke the resistance of forest owners' organisations:

Forestry associations are instruments that can be used by a forest owner and may not be allowed to degrade into a lengthened arm of the state forest service nor its constituents (Giesen, 1991, p. 31).

With respect to this debate about the state involvement in the associations the same struggle exists in Eastern Germany as in the west. The demand for state regulation and the intensified search for efficient structures to advise forest owners and care for their properties must not lead to the same organisational outcome. The opinions surrounding the existing organisational models and the role played therein by the state forestry agencies are criticised from various angles. Aside from the rejection in principle of state engagement in private forest matters, economically founded criticism of the existing organisational forms increasingly arises. In various regions, criteria for their efficiency are attached to the associational entity. Using these criteria, many observers evaluate the benefit of the forestry associations as quite negative:

There is no doubt that most of the roughly 3,000 forestry associations in Germany are inactive, do not deserve this designation and are essentially used as a vehicle for the attainment of subsidies (Döhrer 1998).

On the other hand, some associations are regularly acknowledged to have a model character. These include individual associations that had extensive and long-term ownership rights of their members transferred to them and have been presented as a model for many years. Most of the acknowledgements concern the extent and market power of individual associations or praise their services. Many actors hope for a solution to the problems of the associations through an extension of association services and the simultaneous limitation of the state's supply. This describes a position mainly followed by forest owners' organisations and their consultants.

A contribution to the politically desired strengthening of the independence of the forest owner can be performed while simultaneously relieving the state from direct engagement through the extension of service centres. This aside, the possibility for farmer and non-farmer owners to responsibly engage in forest management on their own remains the classic advantage of the small forest owner (AGDW, 1995, cited by Leinert 1996, p. 2).

RESEARCH ABOUT FORESTRY ASSOCIATIONS

The View from Within the Associations

Considerable importance is attached to forest ownership structure as one of the focal points of private forestry research. Studies indicate that the detachment of forest owners from their properties is progressing and that this conflicts with an institutionalisation of traditional forest management concepts (Volz 2001, Schraml 2003). The non-farmer forest ownership group continues to grow. As a result, forest management must increasingly be organised over long distances, i.e. it must take place during the free time of the owner, whose primary residence may be located far from his land. Accordingly, forest management competes with a host of other free-

time activities for the scarce, if not barely sufficient, time budget of the owner. The term 'urban forest owner' makes this clear (Schraml and Hårdter 2002). In this respect, an apparent discrepancy arises between the demands promoted by associations in public discourse and reality.

The social structure of the forest owners and their needs only at first sight conform to the presumptions that underlie the various associational models. In fact, the more urban the lifestyle of the forest owners, the more important the demand for services will be. The amount of individual initiative taken by forest owners with regard to their properties decreases constantly from full-time farmers to part-time farmers, with non-farmers having the least input. A clear correlation between various lifestyles and the preparedness to give up ownership rights to third parties is apparent among non-farmers (Hårdter 2003).

Urban forest owners also hardly ever demand the services of associations. Rapp (2000), who concerned himself with the cooperation of members in associations, came to this conclusion. This author associated cooperation with such features as the demand for services, the common sale of wood, and the undertaking of honorary positions in the organisation. He determined that active cooperation in the organisation as well as the demand for services concentrate themselves for the most part on full-time farmers. Part-time farmers and non-farmers contribute little to occurrences in the associations and also profit little from their activities. The non-farmers are not only clearly underrepresented in the associations; they are also barely integrated or engaged.

It has been confirmed in many forest owner surveys that the so-called urban forest owners gain little from the work of the associations. Steinkamp (1979) found that, according to their own assessment, forest owners with large forest areas more commonly benefit from their membership in an association. This was confirmed by the results of his comparison of the experiences of members and non-members. Whereas for almost all members the advantages of enrolment predominate, more than one third of the non-members have not had any good experiences. Until today not much has changed to this situation. Unlike the farmers, the non-farmers seldom use the associations as a source of information on forest management (Hårdter 2003, p. 65). They are also less interested in an expansion of the provision of services of the associations. An expansion of the activities is desired above all by full-time and part-time farmers (Bollin and Eklkofer 2000, p. 52).

One attribute of the associations above all can be seen as a main cause for these findings: they are still perceived primarily as wood selling organisations by the organisation's management as well as the members. The association's managers thus see the needs of their members represented (Rapp 1998). For the members, the demand for other services falls into the background, since these people are accustomed to managing their forests on their own (Neumann 1984, Bollin and Eklkofer 2000, Rapp 2000). Those who are not organised in the associations still have access to state services, which are largely free of charge and do not force them into membership of an association. Where income is not the overriding concern and the lifestyles of the owners are individualised, the service provided through experts of the public forestry agencies is occasionally more attractive than that of the farmer-dominated association, which has the sale of timber as its primary goal (Bittner 2003).

Even the main point of the political debate that the organisational form, especially the internal ruling of the relation between the organisation's leadership and its members, determines the economic success of the association is called into question. With the help of a survey, Wilkening (1984) investigated various factors to find the degree to which they explained the performance-related differences that existed between associations. He concludes that, above all, natural conditions and property structure are of great importance. According to this view, the site provisions and tree species composition of a region along with the ownership structure (i.e. the specific needs of the forest owner) determine the intensity of cooperation in the associations. The inner-organisation of the associations – mainly the distribution of property rights as well as the organisational and technical performance of the forest work – thereby plays a subordinate role with regard to the intensity of cooperation.

Evaluation of Private Forest Policy

Consensus exists in literature that, notwithstanding the verbal support of associational thinking, the organisations receive relatively little public funding. Almost all means of support are individually paid out to individual businesses. In lieu of this the associations are often institutionally supported through the state. Hilt (2003) described this as the 'paradox of the support of forestry associations.' In regions with a high degree of state influence on the associations, the communication networks concentrate themselves logically also within the association on a contact representative from the state agency. This representative produces more contacts and a higher degree of recognition among the members than, for example, employees of the associations (Rapp 2000). This model is openly explained during interviews by employees of the forest service through the existing state of competition in the service market. The associations are not only conceptualised as a state forest policy instrument, but also serve the legitimisation of state structures and use of public resources (Hilt 2003).

From an economic perspective the development of the associational entity is often accompanied by much criticism. Optimistic assessments, which foresee 'the best economic impacts' for the smallest private forest ownership group where cooperation between businesses exists (Brandl 1977, p. 98), conflict with the sobering results, for example, of model calculations of the economic benefit of associations for individual businesses: 'In contradiction to the very optimistic prognoses sometimes made, it could be shown that there were relatively poor results in the beginning. Really evident success could only be achieved in the long-term by improving the quality of stands' (Brabänder 1981).

The majority of analysts view state involvement in the associations very critically. Brabänder (1981) came to the conclusion that, 'in general, subsidisation of forestry associations proved to be insufficient'. The repeatedly carried out attempts to measure the efficiency of associations and their economic advantage often fail. Due to vague formulations of objectives and inadequate documentation of the state support that is actually pursued, they do not come up with quantitative assertions about the efficiency of the German associational entity (Brabänder *et al.* 1980, Moog and Borchert 1999).

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up the dominating story lines of the public debate and the main findings of contemporary research on forestry associations, a heuristic model explaining the development of forestry associations in Germany is suggested (Figure 2). It is based on the earlier presented assumptions from institutional theory.

At present, less than a third of forest owners in Germany are organised in forestry associations. Although it is mainly the owners of larger forest businesses who tend to be members, the associations still represent a considerable share of small private forest area in some regions. Until now the associations have been committed to the guiding principle of realising sustainable forest management and improving the marketability of timber from small private forests. The widespread concern until the middle of the 20th century that this objective was not being achieved because of forest use that was solely fulfilling agricultural goals, gave way to the assessment that forests and forestry would suffer under the lack of expertise of every forest owner that is no longer a farmer. In each case the relevant actors constantly complained about the inadequacy of institutionalisation of significant management rules that are commonsense for large forestry businesses. Associations should fulfil exactly this deficiency. In addition, property rights should be reordered into associations, if necessary, and forest management should be centrally directed. In this regard, forestry associations show isomorphism to these essential 'forestry myths'.

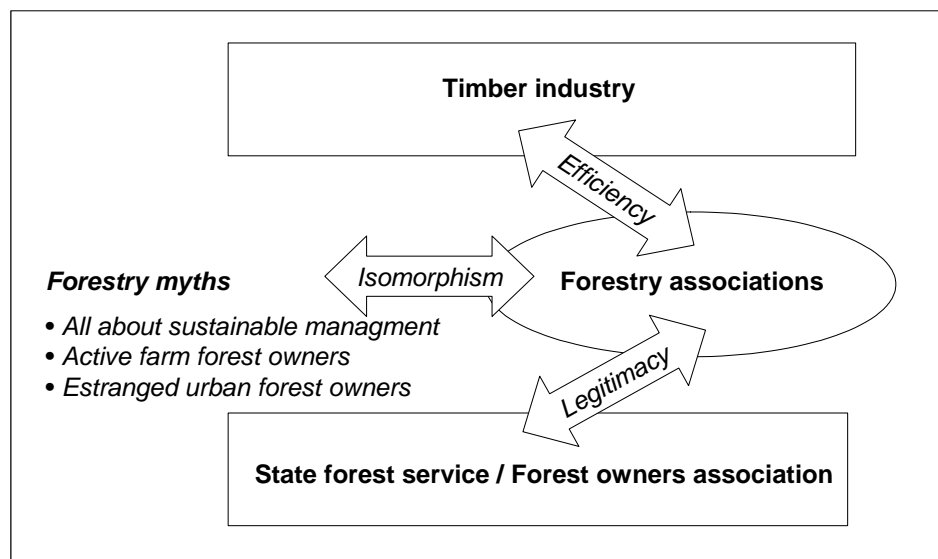


Figure 2. Forestry associations as a reaction on forestry myths, efficiency and legitimacy needs

This discussion has almost always stayed theoretical, and often organisations that were purely concerned with the sale of wood were created which orient themselves to the needs of their farmer clientele. They do not require the least amount of

commitment from their members, but have become of existential importance for this forest ownership group. Access to the timber market is often facilitated exclusively with the help of the association. Several examples exist which show that cooperation between forest owners can lead to relatively efficient forest management and joint wood marketing. Today, as was the case 100 years ago, the associational forms that are based on voluntary membership are strong in areas where many large agricultural businesses with forests exist. Conversely, it is difficult to establish associations without this group. Nowadays, this correlation is becoming especially clear in eastern Germany.

The smallest forest owners, whose structural problems give rational grounds for the establishment of organisations, are rarely members and even more seldom make use of the existing services. However, they play an important role in ensuring the continuance of associations. Their existence legitimises state engagement as well as the rent-seeking activities of forest owners' associations. Since the urban forest owners, and in part also their forests, so clearly differ from the ideal perception of the engaged forest owner (i.e. from sustainable forest management), they give reason for lasting state engagement and thereby the use of public resources. In this regard associations are effective, because it is worth their while to obtain resources, even though it has been claimed for decades that they are being inefficiently set up. Still, the actual objective of the associational entity to passively integrate the smallest forest owners constantly eludes a large number of the organisations.

It is no peculiarity that associations survive. Meyer and Zucker (1989) have shown through numerous case studies taken from other branches of work that the probability that even an organisation with little functional ability will fail, becomes less the older the organisation is. Furthermore, it should not to be assumed that an improvement in the situation takes place as an organisation ages. Efficiency is only a factor to explain the existence of organisations; legitimacy is often much more important (Hasse and Krücken 1999).

The public debate over forestry associations has adapted to each forest political discussion of the last few decades. Associations were supposed to have contributed to the reconstruction of Germany after the wars, to have marketed the amenity functions of the forest, to have provided a globalised timber industry with raw materials and to have contributed to the development of rural areas. In the words of Meyer and Rowan (1977), all associations have grasped open myths that their societal environment has developed, and they have demonstratively brought them to bear. By these means, the formal structure of the associations was repeatedly adjusted, but little has changed with regard to their membership, their concentration on the sale of wood and their functional structure.

Currently, public debate is concentrated on the relationship of the forestry associations with the state forestry agencies. The new relationships between these two groups are determined by a new orientation of public management and the expansion of private service structures. Duties that were formerly performed by the state are being outsourced to organisations or privatised. For the associations this means that they are now adapting the societal myth of privatisation. The cause for these changes is the current situation of public finances. But the changes are decisively hastened through international trends of new public management (Edeling 2002). Even the vocabulary used for the reforms is normative enough to compel agencies as well as associations to follow this trend, so as not to lose

legitimacy and public support. The conception of a problem and the solutions in the form of dispersed models follow particular trend terms and environmental expectations. The organisational change therefore ensues homogenously according to specific guidelines and not according to the efficiency of individual configurations and organisational forms.

The continuing debate reaffirms the following assumption: just as state influence on forestry associations, which has regionally been very strong for a long time, has not allowed itself to be explained through the assumptions of institutional economics, neither does the lack of efficiency in the fulfilment of duties explain the retreat of the state from more direct involvement that is now taking place from this field. A specific historical division of interests and power between the state forestry agencies and forest owners' associations provides some explanation. Under the vocation of legitimising guiding principles, it enabled the configuration that is still effective today, and it is now in the process of disturbing it again.

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